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A three-phase, longitudinal study at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., of family problems with prolonged father absence indicates that there is (1) continuing family growth beyond the situational crisis, (2) active re-examination of roles and values, and (3) heightened awareness of family strength and resourcefulness during the career-syntonic, non-life endangering 13-month father absences of professional military men. Before family separation, 67 families with five- to eight-year old sons participated in an assessment evaluation including interviews, standard and experimental test batteries, and inventories. All objective measures were repeated with 40 families, six to nine months after family separation. Some six months after family reintegration, 18 families (12 experimental, six control) were re-evaluated. Family adaptation during father absence was marked by social introversion, role reversal, and developmental phase prolongation. The families coped by means of direct, appropriate problem-solving and substitutive gratifications. Recommendations for community support of families facing extended father absence include primary, secondary, and tertiary problem prevention considerations from the educational, religious, and medical communities.

# IMPACT OF FATHER ABSENCE: III. PROBLEMS OF FAMILY REINTEGRATION FOLLOWING PROLONGED FATHER ABSENCE*

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## PROLOGUE

"It scared him sick for a minute with that gone-empty sickness before you roll into combat. After wanting so long so bad to be home, he was afraid to get there . . . The family glanced at him in sudden apprehension . . . Father and husband, blood and union, mainstay of their life--or wanderer in foreign land, stranger--'Well, we et good anyhow,' she said, and set the platter down on the long board table, in her preoccupation taking the head herself. The children trooped after her to their places on the benches. 'Charles, give the blessing,' she said, then caught herself, flushing up as she saw Rad still standing.-----He took the chair she gave up to him."

Hurry Sundown, K. B. Gilden
Doubleday, 1964

Contemporary literature reflects an increasing sensitivity to the major and complex issues of the family reintegration experience, major because of the frequency of its occurrence across the country, and complex because it involves

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to such depths both the family structure and the individual psychology of each member.[2,3,4]

For the last three years, a multi-disciplinary behavioral science team at Walter Reed General Hospital has been collecting and analyzing data on families undergoing career-relevant stresses of military life.[5,6] Regular Army middle rank enlisted men (Grades E-4 to E-6) stationed in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area who were alerted for overseas assignment were screened for inclusion in a longitudinal study of the impact of father absence. Acceptance criteria required that the soldier: (1) be married and currently living with his family; (2) have a 5- to 8-year-old male child; and (3) be on orders for an unaccompanied-by-family tour of at least one year to a non-combat area. These families were asked to participate in a research project designed to study characteristics and experiences of the military family. Participation was defined as including an initial visit to Walter Reed by both parents and son, and possible follow-up contacts later on. All of the families had already received notice of father's overseas assignment by the time we saw them.

Our sample was considered representative of the large group of military career professionals: at the time of first contact they averaged 13.6 years of military service; the fathers averaged 32.8 years of age; the mothers averaged 28.6 years. Fathers' mean education level was 11.86 years. Parents had been married an average of 8.1 years. Mean number of children was 3.1 and mean age of the index male child was 6.4 years.

## METHODOLOGY

One to three months prior to father's departure, the family was seen for an initial evaluation (Phase I). Sociological and demographic background was obtained, and mother and father were separately interviewed to ascertain

ratings on basic child-rearing variables as factor-analyzed and reported by Becker et al.[7] A battery of standard and experimental techniques was administered to parents and child. The parent battery included: (1) The IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire,[8] and Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire;[9] (2) Objective Apperception Test;[10] (3) The Military Life Questionnaire;[11] (4) Child Problem Checklist;[12] (5) Family Role Inventory (developed by one of the investigators (Janda[5]); and (6) objective inventories concerning family social participation and financial status. Each child was administered (7) a Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test; (8) House-Person-Family Drawings; (9) Blacky Test;[13,14] and (10) Lynn Structured Doll Play Test.[15] The assessment was obviously programmed to be extensive, requiring that the family spend several hours with the research team.

A total of 67 families were studied in Phase I. Twenty-seven of these, for a variety of reasons, became unavailable or no longer met our criteria by Phase II, and data were therefore collected on 40 families.[5] Due to factors characteristic of the military milieu, the orders of many of the fathers on overseas alert had been changed or cancelled so that at the time of re-evaluation only 23 of the 40 families were actually living through a separation. The families who continued to live in our area with father at home became a Control (Cn) group. Procedures during subsequent assessments were extended to collect data on family coping styles.

Not less than 6 nor more than 9 months after the father had departed for the hardship tour (that is, some 9 to 12 months after he had received the original alerting order), the family was contacted for a Phase II evaluation. Families remaining in the Washington area were interviewed personally and all objective measures were repeated. Only paper-and-pencil techniques were employed for those who moved out of town since data from them were collected via

the mails. As a result, information was less complete for out-of-town families--mothers completing only items 1, 3, 4, and 6 from the Phase I battery. However, with all mothers, special emphasis was placed on gaining insight into family experiences, including difficulties experienced during the father-absent period.

All fathers completed their overseas tours, which averaged 13 months' duration.

A Phase III evaluation was then conducted on those families who had been rejoined by the father. This was scheduled to occur no earlier than 6 months following his return. At the time of this writing, we have obtained Phase III data on 18 families. Twelve were Experimentals (EXP), 8 who had continued residence in the Washington area during the father absence, 4 who had moved away during it. The other 6 were families who served as Cns throughout this period. The small size of the sample reflects a number of influences. With increased commitments overseas, the Army must depend even more heavily on its career professionals. By the time they were scheduled for Phase III contact, a number of these noncommissioned officers had been sent back overseas, some to Europe, and some to the Pacific area. Other reasons included family break-ups following father's return and retirement from the service.

We came to recognize the difficulties of doing longitudinal studies of mobile families. The research unit must itself become mobile. To make Phase III contact with several of the families who had reunited and moved to distant posts, we developed an airborne capacity. Mark if you will the progress of a psychologist who, on successive days, saw families in Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and Los Angeles, and two days later saw a family in Columbus, Ohio. Besides the extraordinary programming

necessary to provide the standard office and scheduling for satisfactory instrumentation, one has to toast the zeal of our researcher who, socked in by weather in Temple, Texas, rented a car and drove for 180 miles in snow and sleet in the early morning hours to just make, by minutes, an alternate flight to take him to Sierra Vista to keep his scheduled appointment with the family.

## FINDINGS

Of the original EXP (father-absent) group over half had left our immediate geographic area to live with or near extended family while awaiting father's return. Our Phase III group includes 4 of these families, as well as 8 who remained nearby. Of these 12 present EXPs, 8 had had to leave government quarters because of father's reassignment overseas. Although 9 of the 12 moved again upon father's return to a stateside assignment, the shift in living from government to civilian quarters persisted.* Our data do not indicate whether this reflected individual preference or a waiting list for post housing. However, direct inquiry elicited general satisfaction with quarters during both phases suggesting that this was a true preference. The Cn group, who had not had to make the original shift, did not change their preference for government quarters.

During father's absence, 7 of the 12 mothers worked outside the home, as compared to 2 who had been employed before. After family reunion, 5 continued working full time. Six of 12 fathers reported working at a second job when first contacted in the study and only 3 were moonlighting at the recent assessment. (Of course none were employable while overseas.) These changes suggest a shift in income supplementing role from father to mother.

The family economy during father absence can be generally described as rather spartan. Material indulgence decreased, as reflected by a drop of

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*See Appendix C.

one-third in total indebtedness. Average savings declined from a pre-separation $1300 to $250 as a result of curtailed extra income, moving and in some cases the expenses of emergency leave for father. Reunion was attended by a slight increase in both debts and savings.

Interestingly, the Cn group's total average indebtedness of $2400 was 50 percent higher than the EXPs at the beginning of the study and rose gradually over time. These families were discharging their debts at a slower rate as well. Their savings averaged only $500 at Phase I and despite geographic stability and evidence of part-time employment was the same at Phase III as the EXPs who were still recovering financially from their dislocation.

The social participation level of mothers who left this geographic area during the father's absence decreased by that amount of activity represented by contacts, often with fathers, which had involved military people, and increased in amount of contact with civilians (including relatives). The increased interactions, did not fill the gap, and thus the total social participation was decreased while father was away.

Mothers who did not move far away and who were perhaps more socially entrenched reported more mixed social participation patterns. In a number of cases activity levels increased <u>without</u> the strongly marked preference for civilian contacts in the first group cited. Although located near military subsistence sources, they seemed to rely less heavily upon them.

Both groups of mothers increased average church attendance from 2.6 to 4.8 times per month during the separation period.

Mothers, as expected, reported more data on family difficulties than did fathers. Six fathers denied important troubles for the family while they were away. Only 3 of their wives agreed. Child behavior was the number one problem. Eight of the 12 mothers described the index child as a behavior problem during

the father's absence. School marks went down in 3 cases, though up in 2 others. The wife had special conferences at school in 6 instances, but only 1 of 3 was able to obtain the special help recommended. Five mothers stated other children were also measurably affected by father's absence, with increased nervousness, crying, and complaining. Six mothers described significant health problems affecting them and children alike. Only 3 fathers were aware of these, 2 because they had to return on emergency leave during this period. Two of these mothers were treated for "nervousness." Six mothers reported financial problems. Community, interruptive school changes, and legal difficulties followed in order of frequency.

| Problem | Mothers Reporting | Fathers Reporting |
|---|---|---|
| Behavior of Children | 8 | 3 |
| Health | 6 | 3 |
| Financial | 6 | 3 |
| Community | 3 | 2 |
| Interruptive School Changes | 3 | 1 |
| Legal | 1 | 0 |

Father's consistently lower awareness of all these problems may have been due to distance and muted communication.

Wives were divided in their judgment about husband's part in handling family problems from such a distance. Six felt that he was quite helpful; the other six that he was ineffective. Eight husbands reported they had felt useful in home problems even while physically absent.

There was general agreement that the extended family, on each parent's side, gave substantial assistance during the father's absence. Six mothers and 7 fathers felt her own family was of great help and 5 mothers and 6 fathers felt that his parents gave major assistance.

Retrospectively, 7 wives described the overseas tour as presenting them with major difficulty, mostly citing the problems of global responsibility for

family programming and services. However, 4 wives felt it provided experiences in which they developed greater confidence and abilities, such as first learning how to drive (e.g., "I learned to be able to depend on myself more," or "I've become able to take care of my family almost alone. I'm not scared now at the thought of my husband leaving next month," or "I learned to handle situations and make decisions that I usually left to my husband."

Three of the wives felt the overseas tour had definitely hurt the marriage. One said, "I thought about separation. I almost resented my husband when he came back." Another said, "I got stubborn and sort of resented my husband for what I went through. It almost caused our marriage to break up. Thank God I waited and changed to my old self again."

In a previous report,[6] crisis theory was applied in an attempt to identify factors which differentiated families showing effective coping from those which did not. Two general classes of coping, as proposed by Lazarus,[16] were looked for: (1) action tendencies aimed at eliminating or mitigating the anticipated harmful confrontation, and (2) purely cognitive maneuvers through which appraisal is altered without action directed at changing the objective situation. Use of extended family, substitution of public employment for social activity, and pursuit of enhanced personal skills indicated that for the most part coping patterns seemed to fall into the direct-action category rather than illustrating defensive reappraisals.

Seven fathers reported that while overseas they were sick with such problems as exacerbated migraine, asthma attacks, and repeated virus infections. Two more of the group required hospitalization and surgery. Nonetheless, 8 received medals, commendations, and promotions. None of them reported disciplinary or legal problems or permanent injuries.

Six husbands felt their wives were more affected by their absence than

were any of the children, and cited letters of loneliness and, in 2 cases, wife's psychiatric treatment for the first time.

Three husbands stated they felt that the tour had hurt the marriage. One said his "wife is against all Army life" since the separation. Another said "divorce was never brought up but has (been) since my return to the United States." Another said "My wife's independence, developed while I was gone, made trouble when she had to give up her free rein."

The phase of reintegration, which is the primary focus of this paper, began with father's receipt while still overseas of orders naming his next duty assignment in the continental United States and the date he was due there. This information spelled out more precisely for both parents the physical and temporal dimensions of reunion. In half of the cases, parents were displeased with the next assignment, citing the major move required, strong preference for a different part of the country, and problems anticipated with obtaining adequate housing.

Father's homecoming was a big event. Several wives quit work as soon as they learned the date husband was coming back. Fathers generally brought presents for each family member. Relatives and friends were called. New clothes were purchased. Sleeping arrangements developed in his absence were reversed to transfer small children out of the mother's bedroom. The fathers had military leave averaging 30 days during which the family visited both sets of grandparents and old friends.

Several unexpected marital crises occurred. One revolved about a quite dependent wife's liaison with another man. Another arose from a wife's concern about rumors that overseas service was often associated with infidelity; her husband described her as "cold and unhappy" for months nursing her angry and, he protested, groundless suspicions..

Two-thirds of the wives reported personality changes in their husbands following reunion. Four of the fathers were seen as having changed positively ("more affectionate to me"), and four negatively ("he's too aggressive or bossy," "more upset"). It may be assumed that returning husbands were quite alert to derogatory feedback about themselves, since 6 reported that their wives considered them more irritable, too bossy, or less responsive.

Seven of the fathers described that their wives were more irritable, bossy, less responsive to them, or showed decreased self-confidence. In only one instance did a husband feel his wife was more confident and capable, but he added, also less responsive to him. Communication by husband to wife of negative assessment of change in her may have been less emphatic than vice-versa, since only 4 of the wives reported that their husbands saw them as changed unfavorably, 4 felt that their spouses considered them the same as before, and 4 described the favorable feedback of being viewed as more affectionate.

On the whole, little difference was observed between "father-absent" families and the Cn group on objective measurements of anxiety and neuroticism.. Since the Anxiety Scale Questionnaire was developed to reflect situational arousal of anxiety, it was surprising that no clear differences could be seen between these groups from Phase I to Phase II (i.e., before and during father's absence). Instead there was a slight trend for mothers in "father-absent" families to show increased anxiety <u>after</u> reunion with husbands. These results seen alone suggest that wives who were separated experienced more personal difficulty and upset readjusting to husbands' return than adjusting to his departure.

On the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire, mothers in the "father-absent" (EXP) group scored lower than Cns in the <u>submissiveness-dependency</u> component after the husbands had gone overseas ($\underline{p}$=.025). This change held up even after

reunion ($p=.05$).

Interestingly, no differences were found on these measures between fathers separated from their families and the Cns (Phase I-III).

Objective Apperception Test (OAT) data was available only for Phase I-Phase III comparisons. The "father-absent" group of mothers were more likely to perceive interpersonal relations as less aggressive and less neutral after separation than before ($p=.10$). This group also reflected significant increases in inclination to perceive relationships in terms of dependency needs ($p=.01$). It might be hypothesized from these three measurements that while "father-absent" group of mothers became more autonomous and independent in their family roles and actions after experiencing separation, there was concomitantly an increased, though disguised, need for dependency satisfactions when father was again available.

The group of returning fathers expressed more aggressive themes on the OAT ($p=.02$) after the separation cycle than before, which superficially might be ascribed to nearness to a combat zone heightening general aggressive drives. In the context of family reintegration, this finding might rather relate to the increase of felt insecurity after return home, compared to pre-departure levels ($p=.10$).

It appears that these results of individual mother or father testing are indicative of family role shifts occasioned in Phase III by the urgent necessity of reintegration. Focused inquiry was made into this area.

The general content of narrative reports of family role perceptions was that fathers saw their roles as unchanged following absence but perhaps less important or clear. Mothers saw their roles as more important.

Specific role shifts were examined with the Family Role Inventory, which

uses rank ordering by each partner of 18 role areas for self and spouse.* There was confirmation of the expected increase in Sex Partner sensitivity and value, in that the rank order rose significantly in each case, by comparison with Phase I. Both marital partners agreed on the husband's increased role as Social Model, probably reflecting increased expectations of him as a bridge to the community. Both saw the wife growing in managerial and disciplinary functions and she herself accepted more readily being an example for her children of how women ought to act. These shifts support the evolving impression that the requirement of dealing with children and solving family problems was actually self-validating of the mother's role as a competent, effective, and exemplary figure. Fathers and mothers agreed upon the importance, and, by inference, legitimacy of his role as encourager and helper of her following enforced separation. However, the husband failed to endorse fully the wife's view of herself as Supporter of Partner, suggesting his feeling of relative deprivation, perhaps derived from insufficient recognition of his needs for support during the reintegration process.

The value assigned Social Conscience role was decreased by wife for both self and husband. In addition to the concrete effects of moving away from the military community, the general decrease in social interactions, and the increased demands that mother concentrate on immediate family needs, there may well have been ambivalent feelings towards a society expecting of both partners acceptance of a period of such stress.

The average EXP mother rated the Adult Model role of father lower than he did, implying that she intends to compete for functions that she has learned to perform during his absence and which she can now judge with more elevated criteria. There was also increased disagreement about the husband's making major decisions and resolving disputes within the family. Wives registered

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*See Appendix D.

more awareness of a need for change in this role following the return of husband than before departure. The strains of re-entry, instability of family decision-making during a phase of transition, and conflict within the wife about surrendering power may all be relevant to this finding. Husbands do not appear to be in doubt about their place and effectiveness as Decision-Makers, nor generally to perceive other desired patterns of change within themselves. The burden of much of the readjustment thus seems to rest upon the wife, who sees herself as having changed as a result of father absence and who expects changed roles following reunion.

Although clearly perceived as affecting family relations, separation in line of duty had no negative impact on EXP fathers' military identification. These scores were unchanged to slightly increased over the period of the study, with no statistically significant group differences versus Cns. Returning fathers did express considerable concern about the future. Only one had definite plans for work placement following retirement, but all but one said they expected to retire at approximately 20 years' service, 4 within the next year. One said he "would like to re-enlist, but I don't want to be separated from my family again." Another said he was continuing in government service after retirement, "in an overseas job, with family," he stressed.

Upon reunion with father and move to new duty station, EXP mothers increased their social participation. The general level at last report remained below pre-separation levels in activities with the military, with husband and over-all, suggesting that return to full social participation and especially military community interaction had not completely occurred. Church attendance frequency continued unchanged for half the families, while the others (including some who had been going at Phase I) stopped entirely. This lag is not surprising. During this phase, the EXP families were simultaneously being

required to move geographically, reintegrate father, orient themselves about his work schedule, and find a place in a brand new social grouping. That any movement occurred from intra-family to general social interests in the face of such competitive demands bespeaks instead the mothers' resilience and readiness to adapt. As might be expected, reliance upon PX and Commissary for shopping tended to be resumed first.

In a previous paper,[5] we dealt with the results of child-centered observations during the period of father absence. Our concern at this point is the vicissitudes of these findings during the reintegration phase.

To recapitulate briefly, 4 mothers reported the separation experience as generally positive for the index boy. He learned to help more around the house and to make some decisions on his own. Five mothers felt it was quite a difficult time (e.g., "He needed his Daddy's help in many things I wasn't good at helping with," or "other children talked about their fathers and it made my son feel left out"). Several boys became fascinated by airplanes, because every passing one might be bringing father back. Maintaining communication between fathers and sons had been an important task for most parents.

During the first two weeks they were back, the majority of fathers reported no change in the index child's behavior. Eight mothers, however, reported a clearly favorable reaction by him. Eating and sleeping habits improved, manners were better, and more effective involvement in school resulted in better grades. One child stopped bedwetting and another stopped having nightmares. Overt dependent regressions occurred in a few boys but were transient. Typically, the boy stayed quite close to the father, recounting his own experiences and asking about father's. The child frequently told the father how he'd missed him as a playmate, and described earlier fears that father would be hurt or killed and would never come back. In one case these anxieties were

associated with a short-lived school phobia. Half of the mothers reported that the child's relationship with the father following absence was better than before.

On objective measurements, all mothers reported a downward trend in personality and conduct problems in their sons over the total period of the study. Assuming reporting to be unbiased, this would reflect the anticipated "settling down" of the child as he moved further into latency.

Results of more discrete analysis, however, dictate two qualifications of this benign developmental assumption. First, achievement of ultimate conformity in behavior and personality stability is influenced in its course by conditions of mobility and father absence. During the separation period, mothers who had remained in our geographic area reported negligible decrease in total troublesome behavior and in personality problems manifested by their sons, as compared to the significantly greater improvement seen by their neighbors, so to speak, in the Cn group (Total: $p=.10$; Personality: $p=.07$) and by the mothers who had moved away, generally towards the support of extended family and home territory (Total: $p=.15$; Personality: $p=.15$).

The second qualification is more tenuously founded, since it highlights differences in observations by mothers versus teachers, who had changed for all children during the study. The implication of the findings, however, is that the entire group of husband-deprived mothers saw less total problems in their sons after reunion than before departure, while the teachers tended to see more ($p=.16$). The Cn mothers, on the other hand, began during the latter part of the study to report an increase in total problems, while teachers felt there were less ($p$ less than .05), and no improvement in personality, which teachers saw as better ($p=.09$). This upsurge of felt problem behavior did not, however, counteract the previously mentioned direction toward over-all

stabilization with increasing age, which was most marked in the Cn group and least in the EXPs who had not moved.

An attempt was made to examine possible distortions by comparing mothers' to fathers' reports. Those husbands rejoining their families agreed with their wives that the boys tended to have less problems, while the Cn fathers tended to share the view of more problems cropping up at the last phase.

These findings support our previous suggestion that mothers' report of child problems may reflect not only the presence or absence of father surrogates for identification and control of behavior, but also the wife's reaction to her deprivation and isolation, and, from our new data, her reaction to the relief of reunion. Meanwhile, both Cn parents, coming closer themselves to imminent assignment of the father to an overseas tour more likely to be in a combat zone, seem to express this in their ratings of greater child problems.

Correlation with results mentioned earlier raises the possibility that another element conducive to underestimation by the husband-separated mother of child problems after reunion, as compared to pre-separation levels, is the need to confirm her own adequacy as Social and Adult Model and to resist father's expectation that this family role will be automatically returned to him.

Results of direct testing of the child in this study were reported earlier as contrary to expectations in failing to demonstrate significant differences between EXP and Cn groups in the areas of dependency, feminine identification or oedipal interests. The father-absent group showed statistically insignificant rises in aggression, feelings of personal guilt and depression. However, independent-mature behavior and hostile envy of the sib were significantly increased ($p=.05$) for the boys whose fathers were away. We suggested

that during the period of separation, identification with father was protected by his continued communication, his performance of certain functions and continued idealization of him by the family. It seemed then that the subjects' observed reaction to father's leaving could not be explained by a purely oedipal model in which there would occur either an overt welling up of erotic and aggressive drives upon removal of the inhibiting agent or defensive self-punishment and fearful escape from the dominant male role. Rather, the boy's share of total family dislocation and social introversion led to focusing of much resentment within the household upon a sib while allowing for accelerated evolution of independence and maturity strivings.

Our data regarding the reintegration phase show that these strivings survived father's return and that the long-term requirements of making room for daddy did not negatively influence the EXP boys' positive perception of him or their identification with the masculine role. However, they were outstripped over the course of the entire study period by the more sustained rise in these dimensions on the part of the Cn group (Blacky: positive perception of self and father, $p=.10$; others, N.S.* N.B.:Were we to predict according to the Norwegian study[18] that the Cns would increase in this regard, and thereby enable ourselves to use a one-tail test, $p=.05$). The EXP boys similarly did not show over-all decrease in feminine identification as did Cns ($p=.18$, SDP). Further, the immediate impact (Phase II to Phase III) of father's actual physical return exacerbated oedipal feelings to a significant degree ($p=.04$) on the Blacky, accompanied by a sharp increase in castration anxiety, making it for the first time significantly different ($p=.08$) from the Cn group levels, and led to a preference for mother's company ($p=.12$). The Cn group, meanwhile, had been following developmental expectations of decrease in oedipal involvement, castration anxiety and preference for mother's company. The father

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*See Appendix A for Summary Table of Blacky.

absence experience may therefore be seen as prolonging the oedipal conflict though not necessarily increasing its pathogenic intensity.

In the area of personal guilt, the EXP boys showed an expected decrease upon father's return ($p=.05$, one-tail) to Cn group levels. The Cns, however, were alone in experiencing upsurges in general anxiety ($p=.07$) and depression ($p=.125$) towards the latter part of the study which may be part of their total family's premonition of father's going overseas after being off orders for so long.

The EXP group's feelings of relative rejection, sadness, inferiority, and hostility towards siblings remained after reunion at the high levels to which they had risen upon father's leaving. In some of these areas, e.g., rejection, Cn boys' scores, which had fallen at Phase II, rose, abolishing some of the statistical significance of the differences across the entire study period. The data again clearly suggested that sib competition and hostility rise with father absence--even in anticipation of it--and we can now add that they persist after reunion. We have suggested that these feelings are secondary effects of frustration of dependency gratification. We also found that direct resentment at deprivation by mother had risen at Phase II and declined after reunion, at which time general dependency concerns (SDP)*increased.

It might thus be that during the stress of awaiting and experiencing father absence, yearnings towards mother as a source of oral dependent gratification increase. Since father is idealized, the child also struggles with the need to defend against his developmental and reactive aggressive impulses toward him. Resentment on both counts is overtly directed toward mother and secondarity by displacement onto other children in the family. Father's return redirects these emotional vectors. He reawakens oedipal impulses as

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*See Appendix B for Summary Table of Structured Doll Play.

well as introducing a new family member competing, though covertly, for mother's support. The boy is thus doubly required to curtail overt hostility towards mother. Increased castration anxiety and persistent idealization of him rule out father, leaving sibs as the main targets. On group findings can be seen as premonitory in such a sequence. If this hypothesis is correct, we might predict that improvement in attitudes towards sibs is dependent on favorable reconstitution of family homeostasis both as regards father's legitimate role and the entire family's need-meeting operations.

## SUMMARY

We have presented the results of an examination of experiences of professional military men and their families during career-syntonic, non-life-endangering father absence of 13 months' duration. The necessary subjectivity of some instruments and small number of completed case studies mitigate against complete statistical validations. The strength of trends identifiable in inquiries from multiple perspectives and at varying family depths does, however, indicate internal plausibility in a number of areas, which we offer for consideration.

This maritally stable, Army-committed, "middle class" of the enlisted population measured the separation as having enduring impact upon them, not in terms of their military identification but within the life styles of the family unit and its members.

After father left, a picture of movement away from military housing, subsistence, and social activity emerged. Belts were tightened materially and responsibility for bread-winning was now shared. The need for help could not be denied and search for it centered on relatives. Adaptations by and large did not occur in the direction of regressive defensive maneuvers or

of conflict. Rather, the families coped by means of direct, appropriate, problem-solving and substitutive gratifications. The mother developed durable gains in family operational capacities. Her self-image was modified and she invested in these changes.

The index boys were seen, probably both realistically and as well by projection and displacement, as becoming symptomatic. With parental help they coped, in their own ways. Feasible defensive mechanisms were used to protect nascent autonomies. Though resolution of developmental crises was measurably prolonged, marked decompensations, hostile rejections of objects and pathologic intra-psychic deviations were avoided.

Study of the data collected during Phase II suggests a "father absence syndrome" of family adaptation: social introversion and hypokinesia, role reversal, developmental phase prolongation. The family sees father as a helpful, though absent figure, whose desirability as decision-maker, social bridge and adult model is being protected by substitutive behaviors during his absence. Reports on his progress and adjustment while absent are muted, so that he apparently suffers less deprivation and stress of separation. He is expected to return essentially unchanged, ready to fulfill expectations of sharply increased emotional and material supplies.

With extension of the inquiry into the phase of reintegration of father and social "surfacing" of the family, we encounter some surprises. Father returns ready to accept some responsibility for the family's vicissitudes and to offer reparation, but he also brings with him the effects of his own situational traumata. Further, he expects to resume his former powers and doesn't realize how far the family system has evolved without him. The index child's response to him is at once less overtly competitive and less freely endorsing. Oedipal strivings, perhaps at first obscured by the relief of

reunion and hustle of moving, are re-aroused. Father's presence does not become an immediate panacea for the child's dependent yearnings. The boy, nevertheless, largely retains and strengthens his previous adaptive accomplishments without overt strain. So does the mother, but hers are not so easily soluble in the re-expanding family system. Her improved self-perception, her comfort with new skills and powers and her readiness to be cared for do not automatically mesh with her spouse's views and needs. We see, at least temporarily, her unilateral expectation that the balance of general authority established during separation, relative to both husband and children, will prevail. There are hints of this in the incongruent feedbacks of personality changes, the continued shift in responsibility for supplemental income and maybe the delayed return to government housing. We do find that in this fluid, transitional period, a stabilizing recommitment to extra-family social systems and values can be negotiated successfully. Over-all, we see a continuing process of growth beyond the situational crisis, active re-examination of roles and value and heightened awareness of the strength and resourcefulness of the family.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Programming support for the family facing extended father absence requires that education, religion and medicine, a triad of traditional community channels for help, focus their skills and combined influences on the problem. The boundaries outside, inside and at all levels of the military system are clearly defined. The total community's values and social attitude can be powerful operants in reinforcing particular behaviors. The Army can thus be a natural laboratory for behavioral research and should be a natural milieu for effective mental health efforts.

1. Primary Prevention:

a. Investigations from other military communities are needed to augment the data we have cited. Greater knowledge of naturally occurring military situational crises should add cultural and geographic variables to account for different family expectations and experiences during father absence. Our unit is now proceeding to study a group of fathers on orders to the Republic of Viet Nam. Contrast data from other uniformed services should be supplied. Comparison is also needed to the reportedly high number of young civilian scientists who in pursuit of professional opportunity and income change jobs frequently and move great distances, often preceding their families by months.

b. There is little sharing of data already on line in this area of clinical research. It would no doubt help to have an inter-service Task Force for Study of Military Families to coordinate current studies of family role problems and to encourage other needed ones. Such assembled data can be presented to assist in designing military regulations and guidelines to provide more effective support of families facing the situational crises of a service career. The willingness of the Army to respond to social and economic needs is attested by the number of established resources, most recently the Army Community Services program. Social service clinics, mental hygiene facilities, Army Health Nurses all have operational routes into the family sector of the post, and could use them for education to better control of the separation period and more intelligent anticipation and working out of modified family roles following reunion.

c. Military and civilian health care and community services tend to

become polarized in their work and even their values. This may contribute to the hazard of social estrangement and inactivity experienced by father-absent families. There is currently no established channel to the family which must leave government quarters and disappear across the military-civilian interface. We should accept the necessity of facilitated collaboration across this boundary. By sharing resources, we can reach and support a larger segment of the families experiencing stress in limbo.

d. Consideration should be given to authorizing selected families to remain in their familiar on-post quarters while the father is overseas alone. Some have no extended family resource to draw on. The happy development in recent years of several large housing areas on military posts, which are available to father-deprived families, may at times be paradoxically pathogenic. Use of these financially attractive sites involves for some dislocation from communities they are practiced and socially rooted in and increased emphasis on the deprivation by association with many others who all have the same problem. This setting may, if not well supervised, lead to chronic disaffection and depression. All large military posts might contribute a few sets of quarters for families especially at risk to these consequences.

2. Secondary Prevention:

a. Early case finding is a major determinant of the success of any treatment model. We must identify the family which is on the way to having a big problem. Case finding can depend on the sensitivity of the Army Health Nurse making a home visit for a minor illness or reviewing the immunizations of new arrivals in her clinic area. It may reflect the art and emotional depth perception of the Chaplain who greets or visits potential congregants. We do not know the reason half of the families stopped church attendance following

reunion, whether anger, depression, or felt social distance. The community which actively transmits acceptance and social role expectations to the uncommitted even suspicious family, treats anxiety and encourages a response of respect and trust and perhaps earlier membership.

b. A number of families contact the community agency for assistance with problems of relocation, separation and reintegration, and afterwards fail to seek assistance again. An educated, discreet follow-up could distinguish those no longer needing outside help from the ones who have reacted to the hiatus by maladaptive reversion and feelings of hopelessness. Improved communication methods and quantifications are required to make such preventive attention possible.

3. Tertiary Prevention:

Treatment of the problem family unable to rework roles following reintegration should aim at preventing chronicity and minimizing residua.

a. Parents can be worked into groups with similar difficulties, if available. The technique might be simple, as proposed by Rapoport:[17] (1) keeping explicit focus on the crisis and managing the affect; (2) offering basic information; (3) bridging the gap between the couple and community resources.

b. Most of the children's problem behavior should remit as a single system of workable values and limits is clarified at parent level. If outside intervention is indicated, these children should do well in activity group therapy.

c. The mental health worker's effort in contacting the teacher at a new school is generally rewarding. At a minimum, the existence of a potential crisis can be acknowledged. The teacher usually responds eagerly to a child's needs during an anxious transition by providing increased

support and affection. In turn, she may note persistence of work inhibition or emotional upset which have been denied at home and alert parents to seek help.

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APPENDIX A

Summary of Blacky Test Results

| | Phase I - Phase II | | | Phase II - Phase III | | | Phase I - Phase III | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | U | P | Difference in Distribution: E vs C | U | P | Difference in Distribution: E vs C | U | P | Difference in Distribution: E vs C |
| I-A: Oral Craving | 23.5 | NS | | 11.5 | NS | | 9 | NS | |
| I-B: Oral Rejection | 16 | NS | | 13 | NS | | 9.5 | NS | |
| II: Resent. Over Depriv | 14 | .20 | E:-2,-1, 0,0,+1,+2,+3<br>C:-2,-1,-1,-1,-1,0,+1 | 3.5 | .04 | E:-2,-2,-1,0,0,+1<br>C: 0,+1,+1,+1,+2 | 12 | NS | |
| IV: Oedipal Involvement | 20 | NS | | 8 | .25 | E:-1,0,0,0,+1,+1,<br>C:-2,-1,0,0,0 | 3.5 | .04 | E:-2,0,+1,+2,+2,+3<br>C:-4,-3,-2,0,0 |
| V: Fear of Punishment | 25 | NS | | 12.5 | NS | | 11 | NS | |
| VI: Castration Anxiety | 21 | NS | | 5 | .08 | E:-2,-1,0,+1,+3,+4<br>C:-3,-2,-1,-1,-1 | 6.5 | .15 | E:-3,-1,+1,+2,+3,+4<br>C:-3,-1,-1,-1,-1 |
| VII-A: Ident. w/Father | 23 | NS | | 14 | NS | | 13.5 | NS | |
| VII-B: Ident. w/Mother | 22.5 | NS | | 11 | NS | | 9.5 | NS | |
| VIII-A: Overt Hostility | 20 | NS | | 13 | NS | | 13.5 | NS | |
| VIII-B: Rej.Feelings-Sib | 6.5 | .02 | E:0,+1,+1,+1,+1,+2,+4<br>C:-2,-1,-1,-1,0,0,+2 | 5.5 | .08 | E:-2,0,0,0,0,0<br>C:-2,+1,+1,+2,+2 | 12.5 | NS | |
| VIII-IX: Host. Toward Sib | 1 | .002 | E:+1,+2,+2,+2,+2,+3,+3<br>C:-3,-2,-2,0,0,+1,+1 | 13.5 | NS | | 3.5 | .04 | E:-1,0,+1,+1,+2,+4<br>C:-2,0,+1,+1,+3 |
| IX: Guilt Hostility-Sib | 21.5 | NS | | 12 | NS | | 14 | NS | |
| X: Pos.Perc-Self & Fa | 20 | NS | | 10.5 | NS | | 5.5 | .10 | E: -2 ,0,0,+1,+1,+1<br>C: 0,+1,+2,+2,+2 |
| IV-3: Prefers Mother | 14 | .20 | E:-1,-1,-1,-1,0,0,+1<br>C: 1,0,0,0,0,+1,+1 | 6 | .12 | E:0,0,0,+1.+1,+1<br>C:-1,0,0,0,0 | 10 | NS | |

## APPENDIX B

### Structured Doll Play Test (Lynn)

EXP:n=8
Cn:n=6

| | d I - II | | | | d II - III | | | | d I - III | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Direction | | | | Direction | | | | Direction | | | |
| ITEM | EXP | Cn | U | P* | EXP | Cn | U | P* | EXP | Cn | U | P* |
| Dependency | =↓ | = | 20.5 | NS | ↑ | > ↑ | 17.5 | NS | ↑ | > ↑ | 20.5 | NS |
| Aggression | ↑ | =↓ | 18 | NS | ↑ | > ↑ | 18 | NS | ↑ | > ↑ | 18 | NS |
| Indep/Mat. | ** ↑ | =** | 19.5 | .05 | =↓ | = | 18.5 | NS | =↓ | > =↓ | 17 | NS |
| Sexual Identif. | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Masculine | =↑ | =↑ | 23 | NS | = | =↑ | 19 | NS | =↑ | < =↑ | 17.5 | NS |
| Feminine | = | =↓ | 18.5 | NS | = | = | 22.5 | — | = | =↓ | 13 | .18 |
| Guilt | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Child's | =↑ | = | 20 | NS | =↓ | = | 11 | .11 | = | = | 20 | NS |
| Others' | = | =↓ | 11.5 | .125 | = | = | 22 | NS | = | =↓ | 11 | .108 |
| Anxiety | = | = | 19.5 | NS | = | =↑ | 14.5 | .255 | = | =↑ | 9.5 | .07 |
| Depression | = | = | 21 | NS | = | =↑ | 11.5 | .125 | = | =↑ | 13 | .18 |

** EXP:n=10, Cn=8 (see reference 5)

* = Mann-Whitney two-tailed test

## APPENDIX C
## HOUSING AND FINANCES

| HOUSING | Phase I | Phase II | Phase III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Renting (Apartment or house) | 3 | 8 | 4 |
| Renting (Government quarters) | 8 | 0 | 4 |
| Buying a home | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Trailer | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Living with Relatives | 0 | 2 | 0 |

| FINANCES | Phase I | Phase II | Phase III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Debts (Average) | $1800 | $1200 | $1500 |
| Monthly Payments (average) | 160 | 140 | 181 |
| Savings (Average) | 1300 | 250 | 700 |

## APPENDIX D
## FAMILY ROLES INVENTORY

### WIFE ROLE PROMINENCE (RANK ORDER)

#### WIFE'S SELF RATING

| | Phase I | Phase III |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | (R) Sexual Partner | (E) Caretaker |
| 2. | (E) Caretaker | (R) Sexual Partner |
| 3. | (O) Companion to Children | (O) Companion to Children |
| 4. | (N) Advisor to Children | (P) Companion to Partner |
| 5. | (D) Homemaker | (D) Homemaker |
| 6. | (P) Companion to Partner | (M)) Adult Model |
| 7. | (Q) Supporter of Partner | (N)) Advisor to Children |
| 8. | (J) Social Conscience | (Q) Supporter of Partner |
| 9. | (I) Disciplinarian | (I) Disciplinarian |
| 10. | (H) Financial Manager | (L) Social Model |
| 11. | (C) Substitute | (J) Social Conscience |
| 12. | (M) Adult Model | (H)) Financial Manager |
| 13. | (G) General Manager | (C)) Substitute |
| 14. | (L) Social Model | (G) General Manager |
| 15. | (F) Decision Maker | (B) Handyman |
| 16. | (B) Handyman | (F) Decision Maker |
| 17. | (A) Breadwinner | (A)) Breadwinner |
| 18. | (K) Community Member | (K)) Community Member |

#### HUSBAND'S RATING OF WIFE

| | Phase I | Phase III |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | (O) Companion to Children | (N) Advisor to Children |
| 2. | (D)) Homemaker | (O) Companion to Children |
| 3. | (E)) Caretaker | (E) Caretaker |
| 4. | (P) Companion to Partner | (P) Companion to Partner |
| 5. | (R) Sexual Partner | (R) Sexual Partner |
| 6. | (N) Advisor to Children | (D) Homemaker |
| 7. | (Q) Supporter of Partner | (L) Social Model |
| 8. | (G) General Manager | (M) Adult Model |
| 9. | (J) Social Conscience | (I) Disciplinarian |
| 10. | (L) Social Model | (H) Financial Manager |
| 11. | (M) Adult Model | (Q) Supporter of Partner |
| 12. | (I) Disciplinarian | (J) Social Conscience |
| 13. | (C) Substitute | (G) General Manager |
| 14. | (H) Financial Manager | (F) Decision Maker |
| 15. | (F) Decision Maker | (K) Community Member |
| 16. | (K) Community Member | (C) Substitute |
| 17. | (B) Handyman | (A) Breadwinner |
| 18. | (A) Breadwinner | (B) Handyman |

Note: Added parentheses indicate identical rank.

## APPENDIX D
## FAMILY ROLES INVENTORY

### HUSBAND ROLE PROMINENCE (RANK ORDER)

#### HUSBAND'S SELF RATINGS

| | Phase I | Phase III |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | (A) Breadwinner | (A) Breadwinner |
| 2. | (P) Companion to Partner | (O) Companion to Children |
| 3. | (O) Companion to Children | (M) Adult Model |
| 4. | (I) Disciplinarian | (R) Sexual Partner |
| 5. | (N) Advisor to Children | (P) Companion to Partner |
| 6. | (M) Adult Model | (I) Disciplinarian |
| 7. | (R) Sexual Partner | (N) Advisor to Children |
| 8. | (Q) Supporter of Partner | (Q)) Supporter of Partner |
| 9. | (J) Social Conscience | (B)) Handyman |
| 10. | (B)) Handyman | (F) Decision-maker |
| 11. | (F)) Decision-maker | (J) Social Conscience |
| 12. | (H) Financial Manager | (L) Social Model |
| 13. | (C) Substitute | (G) General Manager |
| 14. | (E) Caretaker | (E) Caretaker |
| 15. | (L) Social Model | (H) Financial Manager |
| 16. | (G) General Manager | (C) Substitute |
| 17. | (D) Homemaker | (D)) Homemaker |
| 18. | (K) Community Member | (K)) Community Member |

#### WIFE'S RATINGS OF HUSBAND

| | Phase I | Phase III |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | (R) Sexual Partner | (R) Sexual Partner |
| 2. | (A) Breadwinner | (A) Breadwinner |
| 3. | (N) Advisor to Children | (P) Companion to Partner |
| 4. | (I)) Disciplinarian | (N)) Advisor to Children |
| 5. | (P)) Companion to Partner | (O)) Companion to Children |
| 6. | (M) Adult Model | (L) Social Model |
| 7. | (O) Companion to Children | (M)) Adult Model |
| 8. | (F)) Decision Maker | (H)) Financial Manager |
| 9. | (J)) Social Conscience | (F)) Decision Maker |
| 10. | (Q) Supporter of Partner | (I)) Disciplinarian |
| 11. | (B) Handyman | (Q)) Supporter of Partner |
| 12. | (C) Substitute | (B)) Handyman |
| 13. | (H) Financial Manager | (C)) Substitute |
| 14. | (G) General Manager | (J) Social Conscience |
| 15. | (E) Caretaker | (G) General Manager |
| 16. | (L) Social Model | (E) Caretaker |
| 17. | (K) Community Member | (D) Homemaker |
| 18. | (D) Homemaker | (K) Community Member |

Note: Added parentheses indicate identical rank.